

Socialist Worker

Kaimahi Whakahuihui

For Workers' Power and International Socialism

\$1

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No. 45 December 8, 1997

Shipley's Christmas present is to take away our Christmas holidays

Defend our Holidays

SHIPLEY'S COALITION is acting on the orders of the bosses and moving to undermine workers' holiday entitlements.

Her government's Christmas present is to threaten our right to Christmas and other statutory holidays.

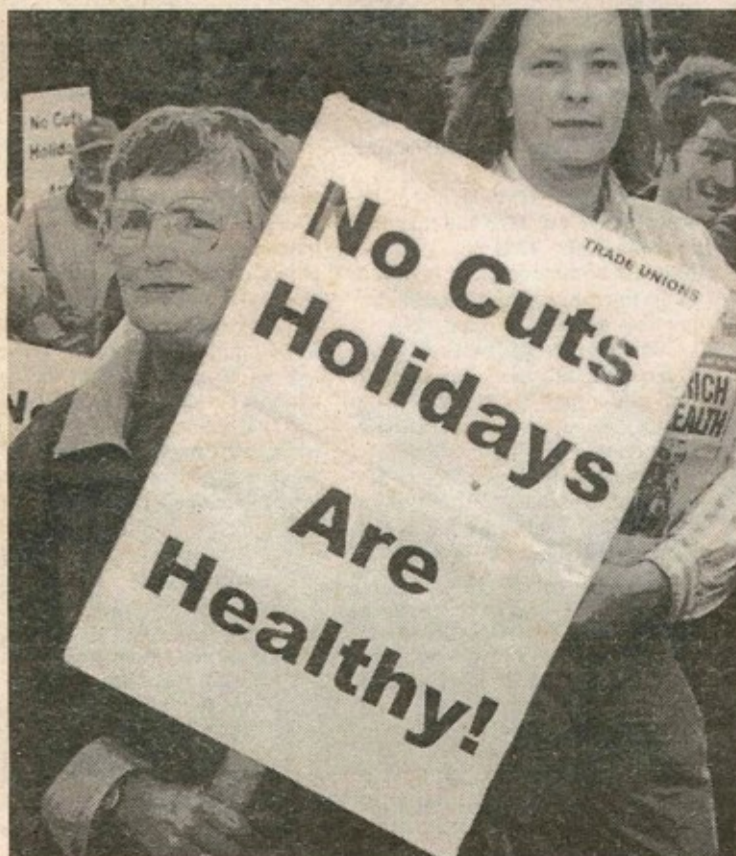
And her minister of labour, Max Bradford, is looking at chipping away at our three weeks' annual leave as well.

Multi-union meetings are being held all round the country to defend workers' holidays. This has the potential to be the biggest union mobilisation in years.

We can save our holidays if we unite and fight. All-up delegates' meetings and workers' rallies are a good start.

We should work towards a General Strike where workers all round the country take action together.

A General Strike would undermine the Coalition and might force a new election. Getting rid of Shipley's government would protect our holidays more than anything else.



"FAST TRACK to a new Holidays Act."

That was the headline in last month's edition of *The Employer*, official journal of the Employers Association, New Zealand's largest bosses' organisation.

The employers' journal excitedly said that the Coalition's holidays review "will be going back to first principles to consider a new act".

Since the birth of capitalism several centuries ago, one of the "first principles" of profit-hungry bosses has been labour "flexibility" (to use today's jargon).

Translated into plain language, "flexibility" means staff putting in the hours at work demanded by managers at the cost of their health, family time and enjoyment of life.

Now the bosses say that the competitive demands of the global market mean they must have more "flexibility" in deciding what holidays their workers can take.

The Employers Federation and the Business Roundtable criticise the Holidays Act for its "inflexible" entrenchment of eleven statutory holidays and three weeks annual leave.

They want to be able to "buy" holidays from staff on a "voluntary" basis. This is presented as giving workers another "option".

In reality, it would shift control of holiday entitlements from workers to bosses.

Workers in a weak bargaining position would have to accept their employer's holiday demands.

And new starts would be presented with a "take-it-or-

leave-it" contract which signed away their holiday rights.

In today's uncertain workplace environment, the vast majority of workers want the certainty of entrenched holidays. It's a sensitive issue among most workers.

But the Coalition's minister of labour, Max Bradford, is closely in tune with the employers. He used to front the Employers Federation and Bankers Association, so he's been a bosses' man from way back.

Bradford is trying to "fast track" the weakening of workers' holiday entitlements because he knows the Coalition might not last out its full term.

■ TURN TO page 7 article "Momentum builds in holidays fightback"

What's the alternative to the Contracts Act?

by GRANT MORGAN

WORKERS HATE the Employment Contracts Act, with good reason. This National government law helps bosses lord it over workers.

Now leaders of the Council of Trade Unions have come up with draft legislation which they claim provides a "realistic alternative" to the Contracts Act.

In fact, the CTU's Workplace Relations Bill copies many of the worst clauses of the Contracts Act. Here are some examples:

- Section 5: bosses can legally use scabs to break strikes.
- Section 67: all strikes are illegal except after a contract expires or over health & safety.
- Section 68: political strikes against government policies are outlawed.
- Section 61: unionists taking illegal action can be jailed for 3 months, fined \$10,000 and have their property seized.
- Section 70: bosses can legally suspend non-striking workers during a strike.

It's almost as if the CTU bill had been drafted by the Employers Federation.

One significant difference from the Contracts Act would be allowing workers to legally strike for a multi-employer collective contract – but only after their existing contracts have expired. This proviso would, in practice, make it hard for workers in different companies to strike together.

Bosses would hit first with lockout threats rather than allow workers to gradually accumulate their forces as different contracts expire.

The main area of improvement in the CTU bill, as compared to the Contracts Act, is the increased power given to union officials to negotiate on behalf of workers. For instance, employers would be bound to "good faith bargaining".

The CTU bill is much more about bolstering the already privileged position of union officials than about increasing the power of rank-and-file workers.

Mobilise the rank-and-file!

CTU SECRETARY Angela Foulkes claims that Socialist Worker has no "answer for working people".

In reply, it should be noted that we have consistently argued for a rank-and-file mobilisation to defeat the Contracts Act.

At the CTU conference in October, supporters of *Socialist Worker* lobbied outside and spoke inside for a National Convention of Job Delegates to plan united action against the Contracts Act. Our paper has promoted this positive alternative over the past year.

But the CTU leaders don't want to organise a National Convention of Job Delegates, even though it's within their power to do so.

Instead, they rushed a watered-down version of the Contracts Act through the CTU conference.

Apart from a tiny "inner circle", none of the conference delegates had been given the opportunity to read the 50 pages of dense type that comprises the CTU's Workplace Relations Bill. What could you call that except dictatorship from above?

The CTU leaders cannot provide a positive alternative to the Contracts Act until they commit themselves to organising a rank-and-file mobilisation – which is the only power in the land able to loosen the legislative shackles that the "free" market has fastened tight on workers.

But we can't hang around doing nothing in the hope that the CTU leaders will "wake up". After all, these are the same officials who refused to take any notice of the torrent of rank-and-file calls



AUCKLAND HEALTH workers take time off to protest against the government, November 11. The mood of anger could be translated into a mass mobilisation against National's Contracts Act – if union officials gave a fighting lead.

for a General Strike to "kill the bill" in 1991.

We've got to put pressure on them from below. We should be arguing inside each union for a National Convention of Job Delegates that will

empower the rank-and-file.

That's an achievable objective in an environment where the union movement is starting to mobilise nationwide against the Coalition's attacks on workers' holidays.

What the CTU says...

RECENT ISSUES of *Socialist Worker* have exposed the CTU bill. We've asked workers to write letters of protest to the CTU. Here are extracts from some of the correspondence:

■ "COWARDLY"

During 25 years involvement with the union movement, wrote Don (Wellington), "I've never seen such a bad thing as the Workplace Relations Bill".

The CTU bill is "a cowardly step backward which will make it harder for workers to fight for their rights".

CTU president Ken Douglas replied to Don:

"You are quite mistaken when you assert that the CTU has no mandate to do everything possible to have the Contracts Act removed at the earliest possible time and for it to be replaced with alternative legislation..."

"The work of the CTU in the next two years will centre on mobilising resistance to the intentions of the government to even further erode minimum conditions and statutory protections as well as building support for the alternative to the Contracts Act, the draft Workplace Relations Bill."

Don then responded to the CTU president's letter:

"I most certainly did not 'assert', as you claim, that 'the CTU has no mandate to do everything possible to have the Contracts Act removed at the earliest possible time'."

"Nothing in my original letter remotely suggests any such thing. In fact, I would wholeheartedly agree that the CTU has every mandate to get rid of the Contracts Act. The protests of thousands of workers since the introduction of the original bill attests to that."

"What the CTU has no mandate for from workers is its extraordinary proposal to a future government which calls for workers in struggle to be jailed, sued or fined..."

"The penalty-ridden Workplace Relations Bill... is just about as much an 'alternative' to the Contracts Act as Shipley is an alternative to Bolger."

■ "UNDERMINE"

Annabel (Auckland) asked the CTU: "What are your reasons for putting forward a bill that, to me, seems to undermine the desire of workers to have a radically different industrial relations framework from that dictated by the Contracts Act?"

CTU secretary Angela Foulkes replied to Annabel:

"NZ workers have had restrictions on the right to strike, and penalties for breaching those restrictions, throughout the last 100 years in one form or another. An unrestricted right to strike is politically unachievable. Change from the Contracts Act is not."

"It is the task and responsibility of unions to work for change. The bill is part of doing that."

"The views of *Socialist Worker* are of no interest to me, but I do wonder why it, and those who write and read it, spend so much of their time attacking unions and the CTU and so little on other issues."

"Perhaps they don't want the Contracts Act repealed?"

■ "HORROR"

Shona (Dunedin) expressed "horror" at the CTU bill.

Foulkes replied to Shona:

"The draft Workplace Relations Bill... is focussed on giving people the right to organise. It is not about returning to the industrial relations regime of the past..."

"I can understand your 'horror' at the article in *Socialist Worker*. I am pretty horrified myself. Over 100 unionists attended the CTU conference and the draft was well received by them. The writer does not just misrepresent the motives of the CTU leadership in the story, he also misrepresents those mainly rank-and-file delegates who have continued in these difficult times to represent and support their fellow workers."

"Mr Morgan would gain more respect from myself if he put aside the rhetoric and suggested his answer for working people in a small Pacific nation at the beginning of the 21st century, rather than regurgitating slogans from another country and another time."

■ WRITE TO THE CTU

If you don't like the CTU's Workplace Relations Bill, write to the CTU secretary or president and tell them so. Their address is PO Box 6645, Wellington. Please send *Socialist Worker* a copy of your letter and any reply from the CTU.

-international news-

The case of Winnie Mandela

WINNIE MANDELA, fighter against apartheid and former wife of Nelson Mandela, has been accused of involvement in torture and murder.

Her accusers at the South African government's Truth & Reconciliation Commission were mostly ordinary workers. Most people are convinced that Winnie Mandela has done some dreadful things, although she denies all wrongdoing.

But much media comment is hypocritical. As Nelson Mandela became president in 1994, newspapers and politicians didn't trumpet the murders and torture organised by some of those welcomed into his cabinet.

Men like FW de Klerk, Pik Botha and Chief Buthelezi, who all became cabinet ministers, have the blood of hundreds of thousands of people on their hands.

Instead of de Klerk facing trial, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Less than a month ago, unnoticed by the media circus, the bosses of the big companies which made billions during the apartheid years also went before the Truth & Reconciliation Commission. They arrogantly brushed aside any suggestion that they were responsible for any offence.

The Chamber of Business dared to claim that it had suffered almost as much as the African National Congress because of its "efforts to ensure that human rights were not violated".

Segregation

This is the organisation which represents firms which had gloried in the profits from legalised racism, implemented even harsher segregation than the state demanded and

relied on apartheid's stormtroopers to put down strikes.

These businesses, still growing fat from the sweat of black labour, were gently chided by the commission but told that all their crimes would be wiped away if they made a donation to the president's fund for welfare projects.

But when all the hypocrisy is cleared away, Winnie Mandela has a case to answer. It's black people in townships like Soweto and Alexandra, many of them her former supporters, who have accused her of direct involvement in murders.

Winnie Mandela endured years of terrible persecution during apartheid because she was Nelson Mandela's wife. She faced repeated bannings and deportations to remote areas. Her home was firebombed eight times and she was jailed.

As struggle revived after the Soweto revolt of 1976 and then the uprising of 1984-86, Winnie Mandela became centrally involved in the township organisations fighting back against the state.

When these organisations were persecuted and then smashed by the state of emergency, they couldn't operate in an openly democratic way.

Some groups ceased to be accountable and turned to intimidation. That's what happened to the "football team" involved in the Winnie Mandela case.

Winnie Mandela didn't fight against this. Instead her actions summed up many of the political weaknesses of the African National Congress. She played on personal loyalties and the worship of an elite of "heroes".

She told trade unionists to rein back their own struggles and in-



stead to rely on black capitalism to deliver emancipation.

Populist

In recent years Winnie Mandela has adopted "populist" policies, swinging with the mood in the townships but without any guiding political principles.

So she's rightly criticised the ANC government for failing to attack the white bosses and to clear out the old supporters of apartheid. She angered some of the ANC's present leaders as a result.

But Winnie Mandela now also calls for a referendum to win the return of the death penalty. She's whipped up a scapegoating campaign against immigrants who she partly blames for unemployment and low wages in South Africa.

The whole Truth & Reconciliation Commission process is flawed. Very little of the truth has emerged and some crimes are brushed aside.

What reconciliation can there be while black people still suffer 40% unemployment, millions are homeless, virulent racism is still commonplace and the old bosses who prospered under apartheid are as powerful as ever?

Winnie Mandela should tell the whole truth about what went on, and nobody should think her politics offer a way forward.

But her actions shouldn't lead us to forget the immense crimes of apartheid and big business and that her political weaknesses are shared by the ANC itself.

Is private property the basis for civilised society?

"IF THEY were all Maori, they'd be marched off here right now."

That was the reaction of Tau Henare, the minister of Maori affairs, to the Taranaki leasehold farmers' demo outside Parliament on December 4.

40 Pakeha farmers had driven their tractors from Taranaki to protest against the Maori Reserved Land Amendment Bill.

Is it a race issue? At bottom, no.

The last lot of protesters "marched off" from Parliament by the police were university students protesting against unaffordable fees and creeping privatisation. 75 were arrested and several bated.

Many ethnic groups were represented among these university students forcibly excluded from the grounds of Parliament.

Since this happened not too many weeks ago, you'd think Henare would be able to remember it. His comment gives a far-from-accurate picture of politics of Aotearoa, where class divisions inevitably breed racism.

The people who're always getting the rough end of the stick from the authorities are the poor and the working class - a category most Maori come into.

First

Taranaki Maori were the first to be attacked by colonial troops in last century's Land Wars.

This armed aggression by the settler state had only one purpose - to dispossess Maori of their collectively-owned tribal lands so capitalist private property could expand in Aotearoa at the point of a bayonet.

Parliamentary intervention and commercial pressures continued the process of stripping Taranaki iwi of their land which had been started by naked force.

This ruthless process of expropriation went on around the whole country and gave rise to a popular Maori saying: "Te riri Pakeha", or "White man's anger".

It's easy to understand how ethnicity was seen as the source of conflict. 22,000 hectares of Maori land in Taranaki was taken by the state without the owners' consent and handed to Pakeha settlers under perpetual leases at peppercorn rentals with 25 year reviews only.

There are another 4,000 hectares

'Once property rights are eroded, there's no sound basis to our society.'

■ Protesting Taranaki farmer in tractor convoy to Parliament

of Maori perpetual lease land scattered around the rest of the country.

Perpetual leases mean the land need never be returned to its Maori owners.

The result, says Henare, was "the alienation of the owners from their land, an ongoing subsidy to lessees and the impoverishment of the landowners".

When the Supreme Court once ruled in favour of the landowners, Parliament immediately took the side of the lessees and passed a law nullifying the court decision.

The Maori Reserved Land Amendment Bill, passed with the support of all parties except Act's seven Pakeha MPs and United's Peter Dunne, was the first step in the owners' direction for more than 100 years.

And it's a very modest step - the bare minimum the government could get away with in this climate of Maori activism.

Commercial

The leases are still perpetual, but lessees will now have to pay a commercial rent, to be reviewed every seven years. And landowners will receive compensation for lost rent.

If farmers want to sell a lease outside their immediate families, they must give the landowners first chance to buy it at market prices.

Each of the lessees is to receive compensation of up to \$400,000 for lost equity.

"If they invest that money it will fully cover any increase in rental costs for 50 years," insisted Henare.

But the farmers weren't convinced. Their protest was driven by fear that they would lose substantial capital.

A leader of the farmers' protest, Antony Eggink, said the value of their farms had dropped by half and this

wouldn't be fully compensated under the new law.

As their tractors headed towards Wellington, Shipley announced an 11th-hour change to the bill. Both lessees and owners would be able to appeal to the Land Valuation Tribunal if they believed they were being unfairly compensated for the loss in value of their properties.

The Coalition's concession appears to have soothed the farmers' anger. One of the protesters, Grant Evans, said they were pleased with the result.

Wept

The deputy chair of the 6,000-strong Maori landowners' association, Peter Moeahu, wept with joy outside Parliament as the bill was passed. It was an historic day, he said, because previous legislation had been unjust.

His voice full of emotion, Moeahu spoke about how his great-grandfather Tamati Whanganui, then aged 73, unsuccessfully petitioned Parliament about the grievance in 1925.

Generations of Maori protests have finally won a breakthrough for the landowners. And, despite Bolger's swipe at the tractor convoy that "protests very seldom achieve anything", the farmers' protest forced a significant concession from government.

Does this, then, indicate that the system can be pushed into working in everyone's interests, even if slowly and unwillingly? Sadly, no.

The protesting farmers said they had no problem with the government settling a Maori grievance, but it shouldn't be at the expense of lessees losing some of their private property rights.

So, unlike the students who were "marched off" Parliament a few weeks earlier, the farmers weren't protesting against privatisation, but in favour of it.

"The government is eroding our property rights," complained a farmer in the tractor convoy. "Once property rights are eroded, there's no sound basis to our society."

Act, the most extreme Right party in Parliament, opposed the bill because it created a "precedent" for the government to "expropriate private property rights" in other situations (to quote Act MP Patricia Schnauer).

But it was private property that originally destroyed Maori communal society. The loss of tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) reduced Maori to a state of poverty and alienation that leaves its dismal mark to this day.



MOVING MESSAGE: 40 Pakeha leaseholders from Taranaki drive their message to Parliament

It's private property that is now eroding our hospitals and universities. Creeping privatisation and user pays prevents working class folk from getting access to health and education services we once took for granted.

The Contracts Act expanded the private property rights of employers in the labour market. The result was a marked decline in the wages and conditions of workers.

Housing NZ now operates like any other private property owner. But state tenants, unlike the Taranaki farmers, never got compensation when rents skyrocketed. Welfare groups say market rents are the chief cause of poverty in Aotearoa.

Private property rights, because they concentrate ownership of the economy into the hands of a tiny elite, inevitably generate daily injustices on a mass scale.

The bosses' unquenchable thirst for profits holds down wages, causes mass unemployment and blights the hopes of working class families.

This system of private property

creates artificial scarcity in a land of plenty. The vast majority of people on the bottom rungs of society must scramble for enough money to make ends meet.

Threatened

Even wealthier middle class folk, like most of the leasehold farmers in Taranaki, feel threatened by forces beyond their control.

This makes many vulnerable to racist hints that the source of their worries is "those Maori" or "those Pakeha" or "those immigrants". But our enemy is the ruling class.

To end racism and poverty, to defend the interests of the vast majority, to win self-determination, our struggles around immediate grievances must be connected with the fight for a new society freed from the chains of private property.

The economy should be collectively and democratically owned by all to meet everyone's needs.

That's the basis of a civilised society liberated from class rule.

Socialist Worker

**\$5,000
NEW YEAR APPEAL**

Socialist Worker's New Year Appeal for \$5,000 starts with the first issue for 1998, out on February 9.

Next year the format will be different. Instead of an 8-page A3, like now, Socialist Worker will be a 20-page A4.

This will allow extra space for your letters, political news and culture reviews. The cover price will stay at \$1, and publication will continue to be fortnightly.

Your donations will be important to help finance this bigger and better paper.

Socialist Worker is Aotearoa's only revolutionary socialist paper distributed nationwide each fortnight. That's crucial in this era of massive political instability, growing workers' confidence and sharper class struggle.

This issue is the final paper for the year. Our thanks go to all readers who've supported Socialist Worker in 1997.

Even before the official start of our \$5,000 New Year Appeal, several dozen readers have sent in over \$600 in donations. These will be acknowledged in the first issue next year. Your donations are vital for our paper, so please...

★ SEND DONATIONS TO BOX 8851, AUCKLAND



SEVERAL THOUSAND students from many ethnic backgrounds were excluded from Parliament for opposing privatisation



Perk bluster

THE SECOND silliest way to try improving your living standards would be to scribble a wish list and post it to Santa, c/- the North Pole.

The silliest way would be to put any trust in the politicking of Rodney Hide.

We all know who Rodney Hide is, because a willing army of editors have given page after page of favourable coverage to this self-styled perk busting hero from ACT.

Rodney Hide, the tireless campaigner against privilege for MPs. The only MP who turned down his pay increase this year.

Well, surely that's something, isn't it? Doesn't it show that Rodney Hide, alone among all MPs, is ready to put his money where his mouth is? Isn't that a start?

No, and no, and no.

Rodney Hide's gesture of refusing his 4.7% increase got him his headline and may even make him feel full of virtue, but it's not such a great sacrifice when you remember he's still left with \$78,000 plus perks to come and go on.

More to the point, none of his grandstanding makes you or me one cent better off.

So what actually would really improve our lot at the moment?

In the November 11 *Sunday Star-Times*, Rodney Hide sets out his suggestions in this department, saying:

"The very best thing politicians can do for jobs and incomes is to improve the quality of their spending, spend less, and cut taxes."

That's it. If you lay awake all night you wouldn't be able to dream up an emptier solution for workers' problems.

"Quality of spending" can mean anything you like, although it tends to mean the ones with the money spending it on what *they* think is important.

Since 1984, Labour and National and the Coalition have been determined to "spend less" and we all know just where that's got us.

As for the "cut taxes" idea, the last poll showed that 83% of us want more health spending instead of tax cuts, because we know tax cuts are just a subsidy for the rich.

I know what it would take to improve my job and income, and it involves none of Rodney Hide's ideas.

To improve the job down our way we need our early morning start allowance, dirt money and long service pay back, all of which went west after the Employment Contracts Act came in.

To improve our income we need a rise over and above the shitty \$9.14 an hour we're currently stuck with in a two-year contract.

And just to keep the job the way it is, we need to hang onto our entitlements in the Holidays Act, which the government is threatening to destroy.

Obviously, the very best thing politicians could do for our jobs and income would be to tear up the Employment Contracts Act.

But Santa will stick a new Rolfs Royce in every worker's stocking before perk buster Rodney Hide lifts one little finger against this anti-worker law.

ECONOMICS OF THE MADHOUSE

CHRIS HARMAN explains why capitalism cannot deliver, and sets out the socialist alternative to the madness of the market.

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Financial turmoil causes panic in high places

LOOKING OVER THE EDGE?

by ALEX CALLINICOS
and CHRIS HARMAN

SHIPLEY'S COALITION says its aim is a world of strong markets and financial security.

Cabinet ministers are urging pay restraint (on everyone except them!) to ensure Aotearoa's supposed "economic prosperity" lasts.

But the Coalition talks of stability and prosperity at a time when the world system looks very far from stable.

The economic chaos that first gripped the smaller "Tiger" economies of East Asia has now spread to Japan, the world's second biggest economy.

Most commentators now have serious worries about the health of the system across the globe.

The Financial Times, one of Britain's prestigious papers, said on November 25: "Asian flu is proving more contagious than initially diagnosed."

No-one knows what the outcome of the current crisis will be, or whether it will lead to a global financial crisis.

But we do know that crises and instability are built into the system.

A crisis on the financial markets is just one sign of the way capitalism goes through cycles of boom and slump.

That's because capitalism is based on the mad dash for profit by competing firms.

Rival businesses rush headlong into areas where they believe they can make a killing. They borrow heavily from the banks to finance their profiteering.

But because there's no planning, the headlong dash for profit produces "over-capacity", as the market is not big enough for all the rival firms.

Downward

Some eventually go bust. Others pull out as the prospect of making money recedes. The bankers panic about getting their loans back. The whole operation spirals downwards.

Nor is chaos on the financial markets utterly removed from people's lives and living standards. The workers who lost their jobs at Japan's Yamaichi Securities in the last week of November could only be the first.

Financial chaos can lead to investment being cut back. That in turn throws more workers on the dole.

Once unemployed, workers have less money to spend and that has a flow-on effect on other jobs, and so the downward spiral deepens.

The financial crash of 1929 led to worldwide slump, massive unemployment and the "hungry 30s" as millions were left idle, their skills and capacities wasted.

The market system is like a blind and deaf monster which doesn't respond to even those who benefit from its workings.

Crisis in "Tiger" economies threatens global economy

ECONOMIC CHAOS in East Asia is showing every sign of developing into a global financial crisis.

At the end of last month, the chaos hit the world's second biggest economy, Japan, as the giant Yamaichi stockbroker firm went bust with at least \$15 billion in debt.

US president Bill Clinton dismissed the financial turmoil as "a few little glitches".

Others, however, are more realistic. Will Hutton, editor of the influential British paper *The Observer*, wrote of "the most serious shock to the world economy since the oil price rises of the 70s".

Only last year the OECD intergovernmental body hailed South Korea as an "economic miracle".

Now the country's government has called desperately for the International Monetary Fund to prop up its economy as some of its biggest companies risk going bust.

South Korea was the latest victim of the financial hurricane sweeping through the region.

It was also the biggest, producing as much as the combined output of the countries where the crisis began - Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia.

The bosses of Korea's giant chaebol firms, which dominate the economy, borrowed massively in the first half of the 1990s. They

gambed on exports continuing to rise and so generating funds to pay debts.

But as firms right across the region did the same thing, they found that markets simply weren't big enough for all of them.

This problem was made worse as each of these firms and countries was also trying to hold back wages and so restrict the ability of the mass of its own workers to buy goods.

The result was that, in industry after industry, signs began to appear of "overcapacity". Factories which had been built on the basis of massive borrowing simply couldn't sell everything they produced.

As that happened, bankers and financiers began to fear they would never get back loans they had made.

For a time they pretended nothing was wrong. But then they panicked and rushed to sell shares and moved their money into safer foreign currencies.

This sparked the financial crisis which suddenly hit the region in the winter, as country after country saw their stock markets and currencies collapse.

Now serious capitalist commentators are beginning to worry that the shattered "Tiger" economies will pull the rest of the world system down with them.



They have no answers

MAINSTREAM capitalist commentators are saying that, if governments don't act properly in the period ahead, then the whole world economy risks catastrophe.

This, for instance, is the message being pumped out by *The Economist*, the world's premier bosses' magazine.

Yet none have a clear answer as to what should be done.

The conventional economic wisdom of the 1990s has been to allow a free rein to markets. That would mean cutting back government expenditure and allowing non-profitable firms and banks, however big, to go bust.

Europe is cutting back on government expenditure so as to meet the "Maastricht criteria" for the establishment of the single currency.

Economists call such policies "deflationary". In simple language, this means they prevent the unemployed getting jobs and providing the goods and services that other people need.

And they make any recession even worse that it would be otherwise.

go bust, it would destroy markets and lead to factory closures and mass unemployment right across Asia, and in Europe and America as well.

Faced with this dilemma, even the conservative *Financial Times* cannot avoid urging the Japanese government to pour in money to bolster up the banking system.

But it wants to have its cake and eat it, urging at the same time the contradictory policy of letting the market rip. It is saying, "Something must be done, but God knows what."

Meanwhile, European governments are taking measures that will only make any spread of the crisis worse.

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And they make any recession even worse that it would be otherwise.

Crisis ripples spread to BHP

by GRANT MORGAN

THE RIPPLES of the Asian crisis are spreading into Australia and New Zealand.

BHP is nicknamed "The Big Australian" because of its dominant position in the Australian economy.

Now the managers of BHP have embarked on the most draconian cost-cutting campaign in its 112-year history in a desperate bid to lift its share price and boost profits.

In a move that could hurt firms supplying BHP with goods and services,

the chiefs of the company's largest divisions have ordered sweeping cuts. Some are demanding an immediate ceasing of all discretionary spending and new staff hiring.

The crackdown aims to slash hundreds of millions of dollars off the company's overhead cost base. It follows the biggest plunge in BHP's share price since the 1981-83 steel crisis.

BHP owns the Glenbrook steel plant in South Auckland. With 1,500 staff on the payroll, it's the biggest industrial employer in Aotearoa's largest city.

Over the last year BHP has threatened to close Glenbrook unless there's a rise in its rate of

productivity and profits. That's no idle threat. BHP recently announced plans to close several Australian steel mills with the loss of many thousands of jobs.

With the latest squeeze on BHP expenditure, there will be more pressure to trim back operations at Glenbrook or shut the mill.

BHP managers have been telling Glenbrook workers that their livelihoods hinge on becoming more internationally competitive, particularly in the Asian market.

But the economic crisis in Asia shows that international competitiveness cannot guarantee job security and decent pay.

There is an alternative

THE MARKET is neither God's creation nor established for all time. It will only continue through its cycles of boom and slump as long as workers let it.

Workers everywhere should say no to bailing out the system and accepting that profitability comes first.

That means rejecting pay restraint and rejecting cuts in benefits to the poorest.

We also need to link every fight against the system's effects with the need to replace the market with a society that places need before profit.

A socialist society would gear production to what people need, not what a tiny minority can make financial gain from.

It would be based on the majority deciding what was to be produced, and how.

Such a vision is not on offer from a Labour Party that bases itself on the very market that causes so much devastation.

That's why we so urgently need a socialist alternative to both Labour and the market.

what socialists say...

Is the answer 'community'?

EVERY DAY, it seems, brings another revelation about the growing social crisis in this country.

Social researchers say there are over half a million people living in poverty.

A third of all children live in households below the poverty line. 40% of Maori and over 50% of Pacific Islanders are in this group too.

The problem of homelessness and overcrowding is becoming huge.

Public health figures show a rapid rise in diseases of poverty like tuberculosis and meningitis - once thought to be eliminated.

Suicide and child abuse rates continue to spiral.

But this crisis hasn't come out of nowhere. Awareness of large scale social problems emerged in Aotearoa back in the 1970s.

And so did the idea that the way to fix them lay with the community.

In 1973, a group of student activists, hippies, "back-to-earthers" and anarchists came together to form Community Volunteers (CV).

CV leaders like Tim Dyce believed the mounting social problems were symptoms of a deeper illness. An unhealthy reliance on the state and on experts, he thought, had "disempowered" people and taken away their ability to help themselves.

The welfare state had become part of the problem. The answer, he said, lay elsewhere.

"The movement for social change," declared Dyce, "must start by catalysing small communities to find in themselves the power to respond to their immediate needs."

Through the 1970s and early 80s, CV's members put this idea into practice. They went about looking for "local resource people", identifying community needs and barriers to self-help, and setting up "networks" to link local resources to local needs.

The answer to social problems, they insisted, was not extra resources. According to Dyce, "there are human resources already within the community, if only they can be linked up with the need."

What's more, participation by members of the community in solving their own problems would lead to empowerment and real democracy.

But collective attempts to solve social problems on a large scale, warned Dyce, were inherently bureaucratic.

"Democracy," he insisted, "is built from the small community upwards."

In this way, CV believed, the community would solve social problems. Eventually, one community at a time, a whole new democratic society would be born.

Since the early 70s, the belief that the answer lies with the community has spread from the anarchists to become the dominant view on the Left, including the Labour Party.

But the community hasn't come up with the answers. Social problems just keep getting worse.

The failure of the community-based approach, though, hasn't finished the idea off.

It's now being picked up by the Right.

In his last days as prime minister, Bolger stated: "To successfully deliver social policy today, be it in health, education, welfare, accident compensation or employment support, it's necessary to complete the move from monopolistic state agencies and provide for greater... community participation."

If the community has the answers, say National and NZ First, then the government should cut the social services provided by the interfering state so it doesn't "disempower" people further.

This leads to the proposed work-for-dole scheme. Social Welfare head Margaret Bazley said that workfare is about getting "communities mobilised to assist people into work."

It also leads to Winston Peters' code of social responsibility. If there are resources already within the community, then the social crisis destroying peoples' lives is obviously their own fault.

According to Peters, those in poverty need budgeting advice, not more resources, so they solve their own problems and become empowered.

While it wasn't bound to end up as a justification for Right-wing attacks, looking to the community for answers was always bound to fail. That's because it doesn't address the cause of social problems.

The social crisis is born of growing poverty, not disempowerment by the welfare state. Cutting the welfare state only makes the poor poorer.

And the growing numbers in poverty and the downsizing of the welfare state both have a common root cause: the attacks of big business.

There's a social crisis because the ruling class have made themselves richer by cutting workers' wages and getting governments to reduce taxes on the wealthy.

These capitalists have organised collectively through nationwide employers' organisations, business-friendly governments and the state bureaucracies.

The answer to the crisis they've caused won't come from "community", but instead from the working class organised collectively.

Mass action by workers hurts the ruling class where it hurts - in their profit margins. This gives organised workers a collective power that no other oppressed group in society has.

And collective action organised from below, far from being bureaucratic, is the only thing that can bring real democracy. When large numbers challenge the ruling class, the sense of hopelessness felt by isolated "communities" is broken down and a feeling of empowerment begins to grow.

And when these actions get big enough, they can provide the complete answer to the social crisis - the overthrow of the state power of big business. This opens the way for collective control of the economy to meet the social needs of all.

GRANT BROOKES

What do we mean by imperialism?

by HAZEL CROFT

UNITED STATES president Bill Clinton threatened to wage another bloody war against Iraq last month.

It's the latest episode in a series of threats since America launched a murderous assault against Iraq in 1991.

The world is a more dangerous place than ever. Arms spending fell in the years immediately following the end of the Cold War in the 1980s, but it's now on the rise again. World arms sales increased by 8% last year.

Yet it's only a few years since we were told that the end of the Cold War would usher in a new period of peace and prosperity.

We're told that Western armies have a new role as bringers of humanitarian aid, not as killers.

How can we explain this?

Conflicts like the recent threats in the Gulf are not an exception, but can only be understood as an integral part of the capitalist system we live in.

It's a world system in which the ruling class ruthlessly squeezes the last drop from the very poorest in the world.

Multinational companies and international banks pump wealth out of the poorest countries – raking in far more money in debt repayments than ever goes back to those countries in the form of aid.

They reduce the majority of the world's population to a life of starvation and terrible poverty, despite the fact that we live in a world of plenty.

It confirms a trend recognised by socialists at the beginning of this century and which is still crucial to understanding the world today.

The great Russian revolutionary Lenin argued that wars were the product of economic rivalry between the major capitalist powers.

This process, which he called imperialism, stems from the uneven way capitalism develops.

CAPITALISM WAS born in Europe, spread to the US and now stretches to every part of the globe.

The capitalist system is based on the exploitation of the vast majority of the globe's population by a small minority who own and control all the resources in the world.

At the heart of this system is ruthless competition between bosses who have to compete with each other to

stop their business from going under.

That means firms constantly look for new customers or markets to increase profits.

The process of competition forces capitalists to look beyond their own national boundaries to gain access to new and cheap raw materials and workers.

So by the end of the 19th century the British ruling class had established a vast empire across the world by using its industrial and financial muscle to conquer less powerful countries.

The British ruling class controlled one-third of the globe's surface. It plundered half of Africa, the whole of the Indian subcontinent and much of the Middle East.

Other nations did the same, carving out huge empires to plunder. Their armies used the utmost brutality as they murdered and conquered local populations.

But the imperial troops didn't only quell and fight local people. They also fought their capitalist rivals in a process which increasingly involved the state.

Capitalist firms need the state, and its armies and navies, to defend their interests from their rivals and to ward off any threat of revolt from below.

In 1914 Lenin identified six "great powers" which between them ruled around 60% of the world.

The First World War was a result of the struggle between rival capitalist classes for imperialist division and redivision of territories, markets, raw materials and labour.

Imperialism has dominated the whole of this century as competing capitalist powers have divided and redivided the globe between them.

THE SAME system which produced the bloody slaughter of the First World War continues to produce wars and civil wars around the world today.

The United States, the biggest capitalist country in the world today, still wields huge power and tries to project its dominance around the world.

It does this through institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, NATO and the United Nations.

If poor countries don't comply, the US threatens to withhold bank loans, refuse foreign aid, impose tariff barriers or withdraw diplomatic cooperation.

And, at the end of the day, it's prepared to use brute

force to protect its economic and strategic interests.

That's why the US fought the 1991 Gulf War. The war wasn't about peace and democracy, but to protect the West's oil supplies in the Gulf.

The area has suffered endlessly from conflicts, wars and intervention – all designed to safeguard the Western bosses' access to cheap oil.

TODAY US president Bill Clinton may threaten force to keep in line what he calls "rogue states" who don't bow to American interests.

It would, however, be a mistake to see the United States as being able to get it all its own way.

US intervention in Somalia in the early 1990s was an unmitigated disaster.

It did nothing to stop the fighting it was supposed to prevent, and resulted in thousands of deaths.

The only friends the US could find to support its recent threats against Iraq were Tony Blair and the British Labour government.

Even America's staunchest allies in the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, wouldn't back the bombing threats.

And the United States is not the only imperialist power.

Japan, Germany, China and Russia are all battling for their own economic and political interest across the globe.

The imperialist powers are like "hostile brothers".

Although they want to maintain the capitalist system against any revolt by workers, they're also engaged in ruthless competition with each other.

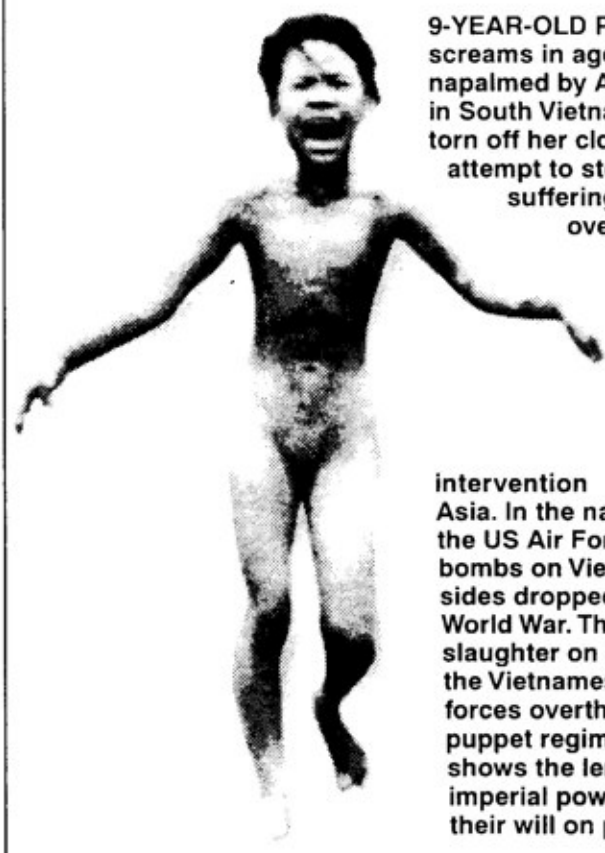
This can mean they line up on different sides. In the former Yugoslavia, for example, different European powers backed different warring ruling classes and cynically changed their allegiances as it suited their interests.

All the factors which produces the repeated crises in the Middle East can be seen developing today in other parts of the world.

The beginning of a new oil rush is taking place in the area around the Caspian Sea that was once part of the former Soviet Union.

It's expected that several million barrels of oil a day will eventually flow from this area, rivalling the Middle East as the world's largest oil producer.

The world's giant oil firms – Exxon, Arco, Shell and British Petroleum – all want to



9-YEAR-OLD Phan Thi Kim Phuc screams in agony after being napalmed by American warplanes in South Vietnam, 1972. She had torn off her clothes in a desperate attempt to stop the pain. Despite suffering third-degree burns over half her body, Kim Phuc survived.

Hundreds of thousands of others weren't so lucky, falling victim to America's imperialist

intervention in South East Asia. In the name of "democracy", the US Air Force dropped more bombs on Vietnam than both sides dropped in the Second World War. This was imperialist slaughter on a grand scale until the Vietnamese national liberation forces overthrew America's puppet regime in the South. It shows the lengths to which imperial powers will go to impose their will on poorer countries.

Socialist Workers Organisation Meetings



■ Auckland

Meets every Tuesday at 7.30pm at the Socialist Centre, 86 Princes St, Onehunga. Phone 634 3984 or write to Box 8851, Auckland.

■ Timberlands

Meets every second Wednesday of each month at 7pm at Apumoana marae, Tarawera Rd. Phone Bernie 345 9853

■ Wellington

Meets every Wednesday at 7.30pm in the meeting hall behind St Peters Church, corner Ghuznee & Willis St. Phone Gordon 568 7474

■ Christchurch

Meets every second Thursday at 7.30pm at the WEA, 59 Gloucester St. Phone Roy 3844 681

■ Australia

International Socialists at PO Box A338, Sydney South, ph 261 4862.

The Socialist Workers Organisation also has members and supporters in North Shore, Hamilton, Paeroa, Napier, Kawerau, Raglan, Palmerston North, Timaru, Dunedin and the West Coast. They can be contacted via the Socialist Centre in Auckland (09) 634 3984.

Momentum builds in holidays fightback



AUCKLAND WORKERS tell Shipley to leave our holidays alone

FOR THE first time since the 1991 Contracts Act campaign, unions are cooperating in a nationwide campaign against a government law change.

There is wide opposition to the Coalition's attack on workers' holidays.

The unions are reflecting a rise in workers' confidence which has fed into an increase in the number of strikes, large health protests around the country and a marked shift in support towards Labour.

There are early signs that the holidays issue could unite large numbers of workers in mass actions against the Coalition.

Well-attended cross-union delegates' meetings have been held in main centres and quite a few smaller places. Many have passed resolutions in favour of rallies before Christmas.

Calls for a General Strike have been made at some of the meetings.

At a 100-strong delegates' meeting in Christchurch on November 20, a

union secretary said a General Strike would be needed to defeat the Coalition's attack on workers' holidays.

This was added to the list of proposals, though many felt it was beyond what could be done at the moment.

The National Distribution Union's internal newsletter, *The Informer*, carried this report on a 100-strong meeting of Lower Hutt delegates on November 17:

"A number of delegates were calling for a national strike on December 10. While this enthusiasm and passion was great, it was explained by the union officials that the people at this meeting were the converted... A resolution was passed that a resolution for a national stoppage should be put to the rally at Parliament on December 10."

If union officials have the will to fight, the holidays campaign could rebuild the power of the union movement. Workers' stoppages can inflict real damage on the bosses who're driving the Coalition's agenda.

We must call on the Council of Trade Unions to front a real fightback that heads towards a General Strike.

At the same time, because CTU leaders ignored workers' calls for a General Strike in 1991, we can't just sit around waiting for them.

Every worker activist should be pushing for demonstrations and stoppages to defend our holidays.

Here's what is needed:

- ★ Regular hui of all job delegates in each region. This is the only way for the holidays campaign to be run by the rank-and-file, not the union officials.
- ★ General Strike of all union members nationwide. This would be illegal under the Contracts Act – but if union officials call everyone out, the law will be rendered useless by mass defiance.
- ★ A National Convention of Job Delegates. If this was jointly convened by the two union centres (CTU and TUF) it would galvanise the labour movement against the holidays attack and the Contracts Act.

■ HOLIDAYS PROTESTS

■ AUCKLAND
12.15pm, December 9, Cnr Rosebank & Patiki Rds, Avondale

10am, December 13
Otara Market

■ WELLINGTON
Noon, December 10
Parliament

■ CHRISTCHURCH
Noon, December 17
Cathedral Square

■ DUNEDIN
5.15pm, December 18
Dental School, Great King Rd

■ OTHER CITIES
Contact local union centre for details

■ CATERAIR

Company denies union access to jobsite

60 CATERAIR staff and supporters rallied outside the company's premises at Auckland Airport on November 28.

The former Air New Zealand workers were protesting against the continued refusal of their new employer to allow union officials access to staff in the workplace.

Caterair took over Air New Zealand's flight catering business in August. It's based in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

Staff were signed up to a "take it or leave it" contract which the Service & Food Workers Union describes as "harsh and oppressive".

The NZ Employment Service recently awarded Caterair with an employment award for taking on 44 unemployed people.

This government department failed to recognise that more than 70 workers were simultaneously sacked when Caterair took over Air New Zealand's catering business.

The minister of labour, Max Bradford, rejected a Labour Party call for him to withdraw the employment award.

The union is challenging the legal validity of the contract, which it says staff weren't able to negotiate over or consult the union about.

Union officials want to gain access to the workplace to take statements from staff for use in the court challenge.

But they've been denied access, yelled at by management and locked out. In one case, a union official was escorted off the premises by security guards.

Caterair manager David Wainman told union organiser Ahlene McKee that, until the contract expires in 30 months' time, he wouldn't recognise the union's right of access to the site.

The Service & Food Workers Union says it won't back down, but "will be calling on our members, fellow unions and politicians to challenge the company".

Labour MP Mark Gosche said Caterair's stand was "illegal" because it contradicted previous court interpretations of the Contracts Act.

He warned that the Coalition was moving towards removing "a worker's right to be represented by a bargaining agent", which would

legalise the sort of anti-union behaviour displayed by Caterair.

"This is the sort of policy usually associated with far Right dictatorships," said Gosche. "It's putting workers at the mercy of any employer's whim."

Both the Labour MP and the union are making a big play on the American ownership of Caterair. But Air New Zealand has been holding down pay, increasing the pace of work, axing jobs and contracting out work for years to boost its already enormous profits.

That's why this "New Zealand" company sold its catering business to Caterair. Not only will Air New Zealand concentrate on its most profitable "core" business, but also use the fear generated by the Caterair takeover to cut the wages, conditions and jobs of its "core" workers.

Air New Zealand is as keen on the "global market" as any "foreign" business.

The nationality of a company makes little difference to its treatment of staff. The pressures and profits of the marketplace turn all capitalists into heartless exploiters of labour.

In the course of fighting Caterair's anti-union activities and the Coalition's moves to make the Contracts Act even more repressive, socialists also point out that the source of the problems is the market.

We have to target the market as well as help workers fight particular grievances which arise from the market.

■ TEACHERS

SECONDARY TEACHERS are taking illegal direct action against boards of trustees which vote in favour of salaries bulk funding.

Teachers say that bulk funding leads towards school privatisation and pay inequality.

On November 4, 54 teachers at Auckland's Long Bay College went on a 24-hour strike after trustees adopted the Coalition's bulk funding carrot.

They also voted not to do essential "goodwill" work, like taking sport and cultural activities.

Other schools are also taking action. Staff at Edgecumbe College are developing a list of activities they won't carry out if their board votes for bulk funding later this month.

And staff at Taumarunui College haven't carried out most extracurricular activities since bulk funding was introduced in 1995.

letters

Socialist Worker welcomes your contribution. Post your letter to PO Box 8851, Auckland or fax 09-634-3984. Please include address or phone number to verify authorship and do keep it under 200 words.

■ STAND-OVER SQUAD

A WOMAN who I know was receiving the DPB to support herself and her two children.

Her boyfriend often stayed, but didn't contribute financially to the upkeep of her or the children, though he was working.

She was doxed into Social Welfare, and the Benefit Fraud Squad barged into her home without warning or invitation.

After finding her boyfriend's clothing in the main bedroom, the fraud squad decided that he'd been living there and cut off her DPB.

As she wouldn't say that her boyfriend was living there all the time, the fraud squad threatened to send her to jail for fraud and take away her children.

She was so terrified that her children would be taken away that she said they were living together, even though they weren't.

When I last talked to her, she no longer had a boyfriend but was on a limited DPB, of which Social Welfare was clawing back about \$5,000.

This illustrates the stand-over tactics being used by Social Welfare today. Yet these tactics aren't used when the issue is tax evasion by wealthy companies.

And it also shows the lack of an independent income for women.

We're often expected to be financially dependent on the man we're involved with, leaving the welfare of a woman and her children up to the vagaries of male generosity.

□ NAME and address withheld

■ UNDEMOCRATIC COUNCIL

I LIVE on Waiheke Island, population 8,000, which has been riven by debate over actions by the Auckland City Council (ACC).

One controversy has followed another. Moves to sell off the native plant nursery were publicly bewailed, only to be overshadowed by the action over airport runways and rights to public reserves – and this was only the beginning of the year!

Then came the ferment over reticulation schemes of dubious value, with accusations of hidden agendas and pro-business bias on the ACC.

Now a highly emotive row has broken out over our

wharf. The ACC is proposing to shift ownership and control of the wharf into the hands of private companies.

Our local weekly, the *Gulf News*, says that reports have been "sprung on" the communities involved, and it was seen by community boards, Greypower and residents' associations as "yet another attempt by Auckland City Council to forgo consultation and rush things through".

An article in *The Waikhean* puts it more bluntly. Under the heading "City council pocketing wharf charges," it says that "the council has illegally raised millions of dollars from the travellers on the gulf".

Waiheke ratepayers have faced rate rises of up to 97% since local body amalgamation, only to have facilities and services sold off in spite of vigorous community objection.

The latest blow in this sorry saga is the by-law introduced without consultation banning dogs without leads on beaches.

I don't own a dog, but I'm angry about this because it demonstrates the high-handed and arbitrary way the council works. It didn't invite public consultation because it sees the issue as time-consuming and controversial.

It's not just big business and central government that threatens our freedoms. It's also the interference in our daily lives at local level by undemocratic, market-crazed local bodies.

I'd be interested to know if this is the experience of others around the country.

□ MARYANNE RILEY, Waiheke Island

■ REPRESSIVE VALUES

YET ANOTHER moralistic pronouncement from on high by His Worship the Mayor, that paragon of virtue in the Queen City.

The Auckland City Council has refused funding for the Hero parade.

I welcomed Hero as a festival that celebrated diversity and displayed (silly me!) what I thought was the tolerance and acceptance that comes with a modern cosmopolitan centre.

While I believe that lifestyle choices in and of themselves are not enough to ensure freedom from oppression, the issue here is about an ideologically conservative group in council imposing their repressive values on the majority of Aucklanders who enjoyed and supported the parade.

□ MAJORLY DISGRUNTLED RATEPAYER, Auckland

■ RESTRICTED ACCESS

THE SONIC Arts Society has been planning an advertisement-free, community access television channel in Wellington since 1993.

We weren't going to charge community groups \$700 an hour like Channel 7, which has just been granted

the frequencies that Sonic had applied for.

We wanted community groups to broadcast free-to-air, with us helping them facilitate programming.

No wonder Act leader Richard Prebble and Wellington mayor Mark Blumsky didn't like it.

Still, we will attempt to facilitate community access television that's not dependent on a person's social origin.

□ SUPERSONIC, Wellington

■ AGREEABLE OFFICIALS

A TOP Australian company executive was overheard making these points on the phone to his fellow bosses across the Tasman:

"I've got those redundancies sorted out. It was amazing really. If I'd been doing this in Aussie, the whole country would have been out on strike. But here you sit down with the union officials and they just agree with everything you say."

Is it any wonder that union membership has dropped so much in this country?

□ DISGUSTED WORKER, Auckland

■ DIFFERENT FEES

AUCKLAND STUDENTS defeated a differential fees proposal pushed by ministry appointees at the university council meeting on November 17.

30 students attended the council meeting, which had a large security presence. They were armed with placards proclaiming "We can't afford a dollar more" and "Money doesn't equal ability".

Some non-student council members explained they would be voting against differential fees as they felt it hadn't been looked into in sufficient depth.

This would have meant students paying four different levels of fees (ranging from \$2,730 to \$7,000) depending on what course they took.

The room dissolved into chaos when registrar Warwick Nicoll announced the differential fees proposal was passed, eight votes to seven. Student suspicions that it was in fact a tie were confirmed after a recount.

The chair, university chancellor Sir Ian Barker, observed traditional meeting practice and used his casting vote to support the status quo, a flat fee.

The meeting voted for a flat fee of \$2,884, a 16.2% increase.

Although disgusted at the huge \$420 rise, students were elated at stopping a differential fee being pushed through an extremely Right-wing council.

It means that Auckland is now one of only two universities where students' choices in courses shouldn't be influenced by price differences.

The council meeting was the culmination of a year of strong protest at Auckland University, beginning with a library occupation and ending with a month of mass mobilisations.

□ SARAH LEE, Auckland

Oppose Auckland council's Hero rejection

Support gay rights!

by GRANT MORGAN

1,500 MARCHED in Auckland on November 23 to protest against the city council's refusal to give \$15,000 to the Hero Parade.

This issue has sparked the biggest struggle about gay rights for years.

Hero is the annual celebration of gay pride. The last parade attracted over 100,000 supporters.

Whole family groups turn out to see what has become a wonderful, engaging, fantastic, energetic, liberating part of Auckland life.

Precisely because of its huge and growing popularity, Hero has become a target of Right-wing bigots who want to impose conservative "family values" on everyone.

A pro-business clique, led by mayor Les Mills and his deputy David Hay, has dominated the Auckland council for many years. Mills and Hay fought tooth and nail to stop Hero getting any council money for litter collection and crowd control.

But the strength of public support for Hero pushed some councillors normally in the Right-wing camp to vote against Mills and Hay.

When a vote was taken on November 13, the council was evenly split on the issue. Mills had to use his casting vote from the chair to stop Hero getting funding.

Another councillor who supports Hero was on leave. If he'd been present, the decision would probably have gone the other way.

Such a tenuous "victory" for Mills and Hay is, in reality, a real blow to their camp. It signals that the tight control over council formerly exercised by the Right-wing is now weakening under the pressure of mass opposition.

Defiance

Three of Auckland's community boards are making substantial donations to Hero in defiance of the council's decision. This indicates that majority support is with Hero, despite Hay's claim that "there has been huge public support for not using public funding for the Hero Parade".

But the Right-wing has been



1,500 march in Auckland against the council's Hero rejection, November 23

successful in cobbling together a noisy alliance of Christian fundamentalists, homophobic bigots, conservative professionals, wealthy businessmen and the like to attack Hero – and, by extension, the whole notion of gay liberation.

Scare tactics have played a big role in the Right's campaign. Mills and Hay repeatedly vilified the "behaviour" of people on one float in the last Hero parade which involved whips and bums.

What they don't say is that this float was entered by a heterosexual sex service and, under Hero's new rules, it would now be disqualified from taking part.

Critics say that, by concentrating their fire on this one float, the Right-wing is scapegoating the gay community while attempting to escape the charge of homophobia.

Hero has become a defining issue in the fight for gay liberation. Battle lines are sharply drawn between the supporters of equality and the defenders of prejudice.

The closeness of the council vote shows that the Right-wing is vul-

nerable to mass pressure. And the recent establishment of Auckland Now, a conservative group which will contest next year's local body elections, will split the constituency of the Mills-Hay clique and weaken the whole Right-wing.

It's the job of everyone fighting for a decent and humane world to step up the pressure on the Right-wing in Auckland.

Things to do

- Support the next Hero Parade every way you can.
- Ask your union or community group to enter a float in Hero.
- Join protests against council opponents of Hero.
- Support Left-wing parties in next year's council election.
- Distribute this issue of *Socialist Worker* among your friends.

WHAT THEY SAID ON HERO

"Hero does not accept that our request, together with those of other gay organisations, should be subjected to personal bias and moral agenda criteria that have nothing whatsoever to do with the integrity of the applications."

■ GEOFF HONNOR, Hero Project trustee

"I have never in my life judged people on the basis of their sexuality."

■ LES MILLS, mayor, after his casting vote sank Hero's funding

"I am not prepared to personally encourage homosexuality or support the promotion of a homosexual lifestyle as an individual or by the Auckland City Council from city rates."

■ LES MILLS in a 1994 letter to AIDS Foundation director Warren Lindberg

"Ratepayers should be very concerned that we have such a Right-wing council in power, set up as a moral police force."

■ LISA PRAGER, Hero supporter

"Gay rights, not council bigotry. Fight homophobia, fight the Right."

■ *SOCIALIST WORKER* placard at the Hero support march

"You'll die. I'm tracking you."

■ ANONYMOUS death threat made to Bill Ralston, editor of *Metro*, after the magazine donated \$15,000 to Hero

"It's just amazing. I guess it gives you an idea of what it's like to be gay."

■ BILL RALSTON after fielding dozens of vitriolic phone and fax messages sparked by *Metro*'s donation to Hero

"It is manifestly absurd to imply that one's sexuality is so tenuous that it might be swayed by the passage of a float [in the Hero Parade]."

■ BRUCE KILMISTER, speaking to the council as part of the Hero deputations

"I don't believe parades that display overt sexuality have anything to add to family values or the beauty of our city. I don't want Auckland to become known as the city of the homosexual parade."

■ PHIL RAFFILLS, city councillor, during the council's Hero debate

"This issue is more than a gay community one, it's one for the whole community. It's time for people in this city to come out fighting for their rights as human beings and show the council that they're not going to lie down any more. People have the voice and the power."

■ WAYNE OTTER, an Auckland gay

IN 1969 a police raid on New York's popular gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, sparked off three nights of riots and demonstrations. The modern gay liberation movement was born.

Immediately after the Stonewall riot, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was formed. It spread around the world in the 1970s.

The GLF styled itself as a revolutionary movement. Its name echoed that of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front and the GLF declared its solidarity with all movements of the oppressed and exploited.

The excitement of the new movement temporarily made up for the lack of any clear idea of how to overcome lesbian and gay oppression or where that oppression came from in the first place.

Many activists came to see homophobia not as a product of the nuclear family under capitalism, but as an inherent attitude in all straights. In their eyes, the fight for gay liberation was a fight against all straights, regardless of class.

The confused theories of the early movement became sharpened into a set of ideas – identity politics.

However, the idea that simply asserting your identity is a way to overcome oppression leads away from collective struggle.

For those with the money, it's possible to assert your "identity" on the gay scene. While clubbing, shopping and fashion may be seen as liberating activities, they're unaffordable for a large section of lesbians and gays.

In practice, identity politics centres on enlarging the pink economy, rather than challenging homophobia in the rest of society. The struggle for gay liberation is seen as entirely separate from other struggles. This weakens the fight for gay liberation.

The fight for gay liberation must be placed within the context of an overall political picture.

The exploitation of all workers by bosses who profit from their unpaid labour cements into place society's main dividing line – class.

The pitiless competition between bosses means they demand the cheapest possible labour. An inevitable result is the nuclear family, where women in particular are expected to perform unpaid work looking after today's workers and rearing the next generation of wage slaves.

The nuclear family rests on "values" which distort our humanity, like sexual stereotyping and second-class status for women, and leaves no "place" for gays and lesbians.

When workers are thrown into struggle, they become more receptive to the need to fight for gay rights and against all the divisions which the ruling class creates. A breakthrough on one front weakens the bosses and opens the way for advances on all sides.

Socialists stand for workers' liberation from below, which is inseparable from the self-emancipation of gays and lesbians, women and all other oppressed people.

In a socialist society which is run democratically and cooperatively by all for the benefit of all, no form of oppression would make any sense. We wouldn't want to oppress ourselves.

Nearly 30 years since the Stonewall riots, the oppression of lesbians and gays is still very much a part of everyday life in our class-divided society.

The need for socialist politics which breaks out of the ghetto and unites those fighting back, rather than emphasising their differences, has never been clearer.

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